

Satyagraha: An answer to modern nihilism

Dilip Simeon: Keynote address to the Eighth East-West Conference

Ramjas College, March 17-18 2016

Zilu stopped for the night at Stone Gate.

The gatekeeper said, where are you from?

Zilu said, From the household of Confucius.

The gatekeeper said, the one who knows there's nothing that can be done but keeps on trying?

from the Analects of Confucius (14:40)

What is truth? asked jesting Pilate, and would not stay for an answer – Francis Bacon

In fact it is more correct to say Truth is God than to say God is Truth – Mohandas Gandhi

Introduction:

The human being is the speaking animal, the discernor of good and evil. This feature of humanity is noticed across cultures and across time. The Bhagwad Gita notes that:

Hunger, sleep, fear and sex are common to men and animals //

What distinguishes men from animals is the knowledge of right and wrong.¹

In his *Introduction to the lectures on the philosophy of world history*, Hegel remarks:

This is the hallmark of the sublime and absolute destiny of man - that he knows what good and evil are, and that it is his will which chooses either the one or the other. In short, he can be held responsible, for good as well as for evil, and not just this or that particular circumstance and for everything around him and

¹ *The Bhagwadgita*; Tr S. Radhakrishnan, Bombay, George Allen & Unwin, 1948, (reprint 1971), p 79

within him, but also for the good and evil which are inherent in his individual freedom. Only the animal can be described as totally innocent.’²

Socrates, executed in 399 BCE for corrupting the young with atheism, epitomised the philosopher’s quest for the answer as to what constituted the good and just life. So at the heart of the perennial human search for wisdom, lies the belief that the *polis* is a community of beings that perceive good and evil, who are aware that a difference exists between justice and injustice, even if they can’t seem to act upon that knowledge. If we accept Leo Strauss’ observation that ‘the struggle between belief and unbelief’ - in other words the question of the source of our moral obligations - is ‘the deepest theme of all human history’,³ then clearly this is not just a bridge between east and west, but a marker of our common humanity.

Equally significant is the distinction between scientific truth and human experience. Science is a product of the human spirit, but human nature is not fully explicable by science. Truth is larger than science. Scientific methods can help explorations of human behavior, but there are matters - including ethical ones – which science cannot adjudicate. If this is true, the matter has philosophical implications.

Our nihilist time: The indications of nihilism lie in everyday life. They include the sense that all opinions are equally valid, that there are no standards of truth, that life is meaningless and ethical judgements pointless. It appears in the replacement of dialogue by cynicism; the evaporating distinctions between Right and Left, and the religious character of ideologies. All these indicate an erosion of meaning and the decline of language.

Some outstanding features of this reality are as follows:

² G.W.F. Hegel; *Introduction to the lectures on the philosophy of world history*, CUP, 1975; p 90

³ Timothy W. Burns, Leo Strauss’ Recovery of Classical Political Philosophy, in Timothy W. Burns, ed; *Brill’s Companion to Leo Strauss’ Writings on Classical Political Thought*; Koninklijke Brill nv, Leiden, 2015; p 2

1. the concept of truth is seen as irrelevant, powerless, or rendered subject to interest groups or historical context (relativism and historicism). In each case truth is replaced by, or subordinated to utility, ie its efficacy in the quest for power. This results in alethiological nihilism, or the denial that truth possesses reality.
2. The impulse to overcome the tension between subject and object undermines our sense of objectivity. When only the Subject remains, all theories become interpretations. In their dogmatic form such interpretations do not permit dialogical truth-searching. Furthermore, we are left with no means of distinguishing between historical events and accounts of those events. This reinforces the effects of historicism. These tendencies result in epistemological nihilism, the denial of the possibility of knowledge.
3. The ancient debate between reason and revelation acquired a nihilist dimension in the quest for a civic religion. Must political life be governed by divine or human guidance? For centuries the civic religion thesis has been concerned with the utility of religion rather than its truth. This may be called utilitarian nihilism, or the belief that goodness and knowledge are fully discharged in usefulness.
4. The reduction of truth to scientific certitude undermines the conversation on justice and the good life. We cannot measure goodness. Since mathematics is ethically neutral, we are left with the conclusion that human behavior cannot have any reasonable standards of conduct. This is a version of ethical nihilism.
5. Ethical nihilism also arises out of the cynicism and despair caused by undeserved suffering. Religion attempts to justify such suffering by reference to God's plan to render good out of evil (theodicy). Secular versions of theodicy may be seen in ideologies that replace God with History. The arguments of these ideologies are basically prophetic: History will redeem our pain in a reconciled future. Theodicy is religious, and nihilism despairs of God - but the contradiction is illusory. What has taken place is not the end of transcendental thinking but its displacement. It

is the future that has now acquired a religious dimension – this is true for market fundamentalism as well as other forms of utopian thought.

6. The use of religion by the state (civic religion), the use of the state by the priesthood (theocracy), and the elevation of the mathematical sciences to an object of belief ('scientism') – lead to ethical nihilism. This is exemplified by the advent of propaganda, which makes the idea of goodness a slave to the requirements of the state. Propaganda is not a particularly modern phenomenon, but has acquired fresh complexity in the era of total war that began with 1789.

All these forms of nihilism have a terrible impact upon public morality. The evil we do the present is transformed into virtue by God or by History. Our gaze is turned backwards, to control the uncontrollable past, and forwards to an ever-retreating horizon. Before we reach it, all crimes are forgiven; after we cross it, there will be no crime. Therefore our actions in the present may only be judged by future generations. The end justifies the means, and since we are always in transit, we can do what we want. History places us beyond good and evil.

If transcendental thinking has not disappeared, but remains with us in the form of orthodox religious beliefs, civic religions, political ideologies and mixtures of all of these, the distinguishing feature of nihilism may not be the all-too-human aspiration for transcendence. The distinction might lie in *what activities* appear as justified to the doer, rather than the need for faith-based justification. In brief, the matter of nihilism and its antidote rests with our understanding of human action, and its relation to time.

Here are some questions that arise out of this situation:

Are there philosophical truths that transcend time and place? If so, how do they relate to the present?

Are there permanent limits to scientific knowledge? If so, is there a place for metaphysical speculation?

Does the ancient debate over divine guidance throw light upon contemporary politics?

Is there a way out of nihilism?

These questions have pre-occupied philosophers for centuries. If we think about them too, we might achieve a better understanding of our present.

Divine versus human guidance: Leo Strauss believed the most basic question of political philosophy to be the question of reason versus revelation: “No alternative is more fundamental than this: human guidance or divine guidance.”⁴ He also learned from Ibn Sina (Avicenna) that the question had been posed by Plato, in his dialogues on law.⁵ He believed that the dispute between religion and science had *not* been settled decisively in favour of one or the other. If there were indeed basic questions about life and existence that could not be answered scientifically, then philosophy would have to address such questions insofar as they affected social life – in brief, it would need to make room for political philosophy. These include matters of the origins of law, the determination of a just social order, the legitimation of rulership, and the quality of goodness.

Regardless of the content of this conversation (between philosophy and belief), the theorists of civic religion argued in favour of using religious authority to buttress the status of man-made law. Thus Rousseau opined: *‘The legislator therefore, being unable to appeal to either force or reason, must have recourse to an authority of a different order, capable of constraining without violence and persuading without convincing.’* This was why the legislator’s decisions had to be placed *‘into the mouth of immortals, in order to constrain by divine authority those whom human prudence could not move.’* The difficulty, as Rousseau himself noted, was that *‘it is not everybody who can make the gods speak, or get himself believed when he proclaims himself their interpreter.’*⁶

⁴ Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, University of Chicago Press, 1953, p 74

⁵ Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*; Cambridge University Press, 2006; p 12

⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau; *The Social Contract and Discourses*; Dent, London, 1983, pp 196-7

The highest possible ground of law is God, but the word of God is always transmitted through a human medium. This immediately opens the door to faith and its opposite. Given the plurality of claims to revelation, we are always left with the moment of judgment, which has to be philosophic, hence human, and hence potentially blasphemous. Moreover, is it enough to say sovereignty is a human not a divine matter? Once it is based upon the theory of the perpetuity of power, does it not become an ‘artificial version of eternity... a re-appropriation of eternity’? ⁷And who or what is the guarantor of eternal power?

This predicament points to three further problems: one, the dispute between reason and revelation is intractable; two, religion cannot legislate among its followers because of internal dogmatic fragmentation; and three, the perfect and conflict-free polity is a feature of messianic thinking, or prophetism. We may justifiably ask all believers whether and why their love for God automatically subtracts from their love for humanity; and notwithstanding their answer, carry on with humanity’s long-standing efforts to establish self-correcting political institutions based on dialogue.

Nation-worship as right-wing atheism: Civic religion puts religion to work for purposes of civic order and stable rule. (We must remember the distinction with theocracy, which uses state power to implement God’s will, as interpreted by clerics).⁸ It is concerned not with the truth but the manipulation of belief. But a God who is simultaneously the creator of the universe and the flag-bearer of a chosen people is a herald of conflict. The image of German and Allied soldiers coming out of their trenches on Christmas eve to sing carols during the Great War of 1914-19 should be enough to remind us of this terrible irony. ⁹

⁷ Gerard Mairet, *The Fable of the World: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freedom in Our Times*; Seagull Books, Calcutta, 2010; p 54

⁸ Ronald Beiner; *Civil Religion: A Dialogue in the History of Political Philosophy*; CUP, New York, 2011, is an extensive and thought-provoking historical account of civil religion theories

⁹ See Steven Johns, *The Christmas Truce*, 1914 here: <https://libcom.org/history/christmas-truce-1914-steven-johns>

The problem became endemic in the world order that emerged after the First World War. The recently overthrown empires had been grounded in Divine Right, but their successor polities were not accustomed to democratic governance. The matter was further complicated by the multi-cultural nature of the societies in which anti-colonial movements began in mid 20th century. Let us keep in mind that the perception of being beset with external and internal enemies is essential to the language of nationalism - the Versailles model of the nation-state is by very definition the home of a natural majority and problematic minorities.

If majoritarianism is a way of saying that might is right, and further, the 'nation' is conceived of as a homogenous entity with a unifying civic religion, the enactment of *this kind* of nationalist idea in a multi-religious society like India was always fraught with violent potential. The ideal of a homogenous nation-state cannot sustain itself except at a terrible cost in human life. The Bolshevik exhortations to 'oppressed nationalities' were a political challenge to the British empire but their theoretical core was not markedly different from the Wilsonian idea of self-determination, which was itself indebted to the Russian socialist movement. This doctrine is incapable of resolving the problem of who defines the self. Both versions of national self-determination were sought to be applied in pre-1947 India. Gandhi's idea of anti-imperial resistance was founded on a different approach altogether.

The battles being fought today lie within the tradition of political theology. Whereas Carl Schmitt's avowed philosophical mentor Hobbes sidestepped the issue of truth and justice by recourse to a realism of power, authority, pain and pleasure, Schmitt himself correctly insisted on the metaphysical core of all politics that lay embedded in the concept of sovereignty. His authoritarian deceit lay in his nationalism and decisionism. By making the friend-enemy distinction the very definition of politics, absorbing Nazi anti-Semitic paranoia into his legal theories, and making emergent situations (the famous 'he who decides on the exception') into the first norm of sovereignty, Schmitt incorporated political thought into warfare, a move which transformed wisdom into ideology. The warrior-mentality was imported wholesale into democratic politics, and utilized to justify Nazi tyranny as an expression of the people's will. As the world has

seen, a claim to wisdom hinged on ethnic affiliation undermines itself and overthrows the ‘strong affinity between philosophy and peace.’¹⁰

The nihilist pathways of political theology led to the nationalisation of religious belief on the one hand, and the deification of the Nation on the other. (Robespierre and the Jacobins failed in their experiment with the Goddess of Supreme Reason, but inaugurated the era of Nation-worship). Over time, these ideological processes have merged into new versions of atheism. No matter how often ‘religion’ appears in these doctrines, they are sustained not by God’s will, but by patriarchy, martyrdom and eternal warfare. As Orwell warned us in *1984*, war is not meant to be won, it is meant to be continuous. The self-inflicted wounds of human consciousness have turned it away from the pursuit of wisdom to the pursuit of power.

The attempt to enforce civic religion in India led to a legitimization crisis of colossal proportions. It is not possible to establish a stable polity in South Asia based on a ‘national’ religion. The issue here is not the separation of religion from politics, but from nationalism. What we call communalism – ideologies that ground the concept of the nation on the presumption of an endangered community – is a mode of politics that legitimizes the emergent situation, the ‘state of the exception’, to the point of rendering it permanent.

The gods of Athens¹¹

Let us turn to another time. Socrates’ utterances at his trial were a refutation of the charge of impiety, but if he was pious, he was so in his own way. Plato’s *Apology of*

¹⁰ Robert Howse; *Leo Strauss: Man of Peace*; CUP; New York, 2014; p 69. I owe a great deal to Howse’s careful explication of Strauss’ philosophy.

¹¹ This section and the subsequent observations on Socrates’ trial and its import for the question of piety and the law, relies on the following articles in Burns, op.cit.; *Brill’s Companion to Leo Strauss’ Writings on Classical Political Thought*; 2015: John C. Koritansky; *Strauss on the Apology and Crito*, pp 402-423; Wayne Ambler; *An Introduction to Strauss’ “An Untitled Lecture on Plato’s Euthyphron”* pp 361 – 378; Mark J. Lutz, *The Argument and the Action of Plato’s Laws*, pp 424-442. It also relies on Debra Nails, *The Trial and Death of Socrates*; in Sara Ahbel-Rappe and Rachana Kamtekar (eds); *A Companion to Socrates*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Oxford, 2006, pp 5-20

Socrates demonstrates fleetingly that Socrates must have believed in the gods of the city for the sheer fact that he had accepted the Delphic oracle's utterance that 'no one is wiser than Socrates.' This utterance had set him off on his philosophical journey to square the oracle's view with his own knowledge that he was ignorant. Further, he was able to trap his young accuser Meletos into a contradiction: he accused Socrates of being a complete atheist yet acknowledged he was a believer in certain daimonic things.

Again, by comparing his own decision to philosophize with Achilles's decision to court death in the Trojan war, Socrates stressed the nobility of individual steadfastness. He did not acknowledge the gods of the poets, for, he said, no god could wish evil to men. The Homeric gods were not gods at all. His own *daimon*, he said, had commanded him to exhort Athenians to cultivate reasonableness, truth and the goodness of their souls rather than wealth, fame and honour. He remarked that he had been given to the city by 'the god' as a gadfly is given to a great but sluggish horse that needs to be awakened.

Thus Plato's *Apology* was intended to show that what Socrates meant by piety was not identical to ordinary piety. He was convicted for atheism, but was he an atheist? It was on his own terms that he was innocent. The god to whom he remained loyal till death was his *daimon*, which we can compare to divinely-inspired conscience, and reminds us of Gandhi's oft-mentioned 'inner voice'. He was both pious and impious - he could be held to be dismissive of the gods of Athens, and his teachings could be judged to be undermining the gods of the city. But Socrates held fast to his commitment - his was not a localized faith but *philosophia*, the love of wisdom, the divine madness.

Satya: Gandhi's discourses in prison in 1930 were significant for his philosophical meditations. Thus:

The word Satya (Truth) is derived from Sat which means being. And nothing is or exists in reality except Truth. That is why Satya or Truth is the most important name of God. In fact it is more correct to say Truth is God than to say God is Truth... Where there is no Truth there can be no true knowledge. That is why the word chit is associated with the name of God. And where there is true

knowledge there is always bliss (Ananda). Sorrow has no place there. And even as Truth is eternal, so is the bliss derived from it. Hence we know God as Sat-chit-ananda..¹²

His approach to the question of divine versus human guidance is contained in a response he made in 1936 to the query ‘where do you find the seat of authority?’ Pointing to his breast, Gandhi said:

It lies here. I exercise my judgment about every scripture, including the Gita. I cannot let a scriptural text supersede my reason. Whilst I believe that the principal books are inspired, they suffer from a process of double distillation. Firstly, they come through a human prophet, and then through the commentaries of interpreters. Nothing in them comes from God directly. Mathew may give one version of one text and John may give another. I cannot surrender my reason whilst I subscribe to Divine revelation. And above all, ‘the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life.’ But you must not misunderstand my position. I believe in Faith also, in things where Reason has no place e.g., the existence of God.¹³

Coupled with his oft-expressed belief that all religions were essentially paths to the same God, this response opens up an approach that departs from the polarity of human versus divine. His 1930 jail observations differentiate between religion and faith, and religion and irreligion (his term for communalism). Truth was God. All faiths were a revelation of Truth, but all were subject to error, because the human apprehension of Truth was bound to be fragmentary. Just as the human soul was one, yet animated a multiplicity of bodies, so also the Truth was akin to the trunk of a tree, and the faiths akin to its many branches. Separate doctrines were not divisive, but different approaches to Truth. ¹⁴

¹² M.K. Gandhi, *From Yeravada Mandir – Ashram Observances*; Jivanji Desai, Ahmedabad, 1935 – p 1- 2

¹³ CWMG, Vol 64 p 71; Discussion with Basil Mathews and others (November 24, 1936)

¹⁴ See Margaret Chatterjee, *Gandhi and the Challenge of Religious Diversity*; Promilla & Co., New Delhi, 2005,

Indeed, Gandhi made it a point to study the religious texts of the major religions of the world, and asked his fellow Indians to do the same. Such was the practice in his *ashrams* and it continued till his last days, when he would insist on reading passages from all the holy books to teach his grieving countrymen and women the lesson that it was not religion, but human folly that was to blame for political tragedy. He dwelt on the need to discern and correct errors in all faiths, especially our own, and suggested that acceptable features of other faiths be blended into our own. It was precisely the inevitability of imperfections that required humans to practice tolerance.

Conjoined with his insistence that he would use his judgment when it came to religious texts, that the scriptures were not to be taken literally but allegorically, we can see that Gandhi's approach to religion was metaphysical, not doctrinal or dogmatic. (This resonates with Socrates' refusal to take the Homeric gods as true representations of the divine). It combined an insistence on individual reasoning with a profound commitment to his tradition – which was a melting pot of Vaishnavism, Jainism and the teachings of Vivekananda, especially his latterly-evolved concept of *daridra-narayan* - the poor as god incarnate. All this helps us understand why the separation of religion and politics was incomprehensible to Gandhi. Answering a query on this issue in 1940, he remarked:

Indeed religion should pervade every one of our actions. Here religion does not mean sectarianism. It means a belief in ordered moral government of the universe. It is not less real because it is unseen. This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc. It does not supersede them. It harmonizes them and gives them reality.¹⁵

Aside from his ontological sense of truth, Gandhi also employed it in an empirical sense, as in careful collation of the facts of the case, whether this related to peasant distress, disputes between communities or negotiations with the colonial government. Truth also

for a philosophically rich account of Gandhi's ideas on religion.

¹⁵ CWMG, Vol 71, p 177-178; *Harijan*, February 10, 1940

evoked the meaning of individual authenticity. This was evident in his repeated appeal for mindfulness, and the great significance he attached to the individual conscience as an essential component of nation-wide civic awakening. The many usages to which Gandhi put the concept of truth convey the sense of an over-arching first principle. Truth is Being, knowledge, wisdom and the good. Attaining it requires public service, and indeed bringing truth to light requires the effort of all of humanity. Any claim to exclusive possession of truth - as seen in evangelical religious impulses - implies absolutism and the desire to dominate others, which he rejected.

Gandhi's commentary on the Gita, the *Anasaktiyoga*, demonstrated his capacity for theological innovation. He contradicted those who used the text as a justification for holy war. He insisted rather, that the ancient sages had used war as a metaphor for the struggle within the human soul. The meaning of words changed over time, and he was entitled to add his own interpretation to them, which was that selfless action called for non-violence.

Thus *satyagraha*, or 'holding fast to truth' is not a political doctrine but a philosophical premise for right action at the level both of the polity and in society at large. This action can have a positive effect only if it is performed without selfish motives. Gandhi often invoked the ideal of *nishkaam karma-yoga* from the Bhagwad Gita – the doctrine of action without attachment to its fruit, which has also been reformulated as 'disinterested interest'. Since *satya* is both the premise and the quest of the *satyagrahi*, his or her activity is (or may be) political in the larger sense, but can remain non-ideological. It can also be the basis for challenging unjust laws – and this is a philosophical question, for it pits natural justice against the formal laws.

Moreover, *swaraj*, or the quest for self-recognition had to be pursued by pure, that is, non-violent means - to indulge the impulse to violence was to undermine the self. The *satyagrahi* secure in her or his commitment to truth acquires serenity, and becomes a *sthith-pragna*, one who is imperturbable in the face of all provocation.

Truth amidst annihilation: Socrates fought as a common soldier in Athen's land army during the Peloponnesian war that ended in 404 BCE. His execution in 399 BCE took place during a wave of fundamentalism that saw a number of impiety cases in Athenian courts. It was a time described by Thucydides thus:

Civil war broke out in city after city and in places where the violence occurred late, the knowledge of what had happened previously in other places caused still new extravagances of fanatical zeal..’ He spoke of unheard-of and revengeful atrocities and tells us how ‘words, too, had to change their usual meanings... to think of the future and wait was merely another way of saying one was a coward; any act of moderation was just an attempt to disguise one's unmanly character... Neither side had any use for conscientious motives; society had become divided into two ideologically hostile camps...’¹⁶

Against this background, we can understand that the piety of Socrates was not an ordinary piety. So too was Gandhi killed at a moment when the world had barely emerged from the worst war in history, and when India was torn apart by civil war and blood-letting. So also, in his time was moderation seen to be an act of betrayal, so too had many of his fellow-countrymen consigned all conscientious motives into the flames of ideological hatred. As was Socrates, so indeed was Gandhi pious in his own way, and yet seen by his enemies as betraying the god of the Nation, for his god was Truth itself, and not a national god at all. Service to his people was a means of serving humanity.

From the standpoint of those for whom nation-worship was the supreme piety, Gandhi was the supreme betrayer, an atheist. If nation-worship is the atheism of modernity, the truly pious man was ‘executed’ for impiety by the atheists –India’s fanatic nation-worshippers refer to his assassination as *Gandhi-vadh* (execution) even today.

Across the world today, we may see signs of the overrunning of truth by Schmitt’s friend-enemy distinction. This signifies nothing less than the loss of the capacity to

¹⁶ Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Book III

think, a reversion to animal existence via an assault on the mind. The quest for the good is the quest for the standard of right action. And that quest must be conducted simultaneously in speech and in action. In the absence of truth, speech is rendered meaningless. When speech is equivalent to silence, we are in a nihilist condition. That we still continue to speak indicates that an answer to nihilism exists, the first essential for which is *satyagraha*, holding fast to truth. We may philosophize about truth being relative to identity, class location, or being an illusion inside a word game or time-horizon, but such speculation is itself impossible without truth.

How can one make a crime out of truth? Socrates' defence was a critique of Athens and its laws, an exposure of its sophistries. It was made in a friendly spirit, the last piece of wisdom he gave his city. If his piety and love for goodness remained unintelligible to his peers, it was a function of their bad faith. Or was it, as some of the Platonic dialogues suggest, a terrible mistake? In that case the argument that evil has its roots in thoughtlessness is strengthened. At the time of his death a servant attached to his companions bade Socrates farewell by calling him 'the noblest, the gentlest, and the best.' After the poison had done its work, Phaedo, the former slave, composed an epithet for him: 'the best, the wisest and the most upright.'¹⁷

Speaking of Gandhi's assassination in January 1948, C. Rajagopalachari, India's Governor-General remembered Socrates and Christ. Fazlul Huq, ex-Premier of Bengal, compared it to the tragedy of Karbala, and Louis Fischer said that all humanity wept for this old man in a loin cloth. George Bernard Shaw said, 'It shows how dangerous it is to be good'. In India today, Mohandas Gandhi is both an icon and a forlorn figure, even though his stature in world history is assured. Ideological extremism has eroded our capacity to discern goodness, as it did for the jury in Athens in 399 BCE. That twenty-five centuries separate that event from our time shows that some things do not change. There are indeed eternal verities and nihilism is an ever present danger. But ordinary people still recognize such friends of humanity - on India's larger railway stations you can get a cheap Hindi paperback entitled *Sukraat*.

¹⁷ See Debra Nails, op. cit.; *The Trial and Death of Socrates*; fn 11.

Napoleon's victory at the battle of Jena in 1806 coincided with Hegel's completion of his manuscript of *The Phenomenology of Mind*. Hegel then lived in Jena, and famously commented that he had seen the World Spirit on horseback ride out to survey his reign. In the midst of the first total war, the philosopher of reconciliation could not foresee that two centuries later, mindfulness itself would be in mortal danger, and the horse would run away with the spirit. We may however, take courage in the tenacity with which humanity clings to the memory of 'the noblest, the gentlest, and the best.'